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THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY OF THE U.S. CROP CORPS 1944

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HOW TO GET A FARM JOB

Shaped by needs and demands, the Women's Land Army is largely an army of seasonal workers. The need for women farm workers can best be determined locally, since weather plays an important part in the amount of yield and in the time of harvest. The responsibility for assisting farmers to meet their labor needs has been placed upon the county agricultural agents, approximately 3,000 in number. Many of these agents have a farm-labor assistant. There are several thousand farm-labor offices. County agents' offices are located at the county seat, usually in the county courthouse or the Federal building.

The woman wishing to do farm work near home for short periods of time should wait for the local call. It will come over the radio and through the press just before help is needed. Directions will be given at that time as to when and where to go.

The woman wishing to plan for a working vacation on a farm or in a labor-supply camp, or to do farm work the year round, should first consult her county agricultural agent. Further information can be obtained from the assistant State farm-labor supervisor in charge of the Women's Land Army. She usually is located at the State agricultural college, or her name will be furnished by the Women's Land Army Division, Extension Farm Labor Program, War Food Administration, Washington 25, D. C.

COVER PICTURE.—Margaret Webb, employed on a farm in Ipswich, Mass., for year-round general farm work, is typical of many women and girls who are taking the place of men on farms. The man for whom Margaret substitutes is her fiancé, who is serving with the Marines in a tank outfit somewhere in the South Pacific. Margaret's farm job includes driving a tractor (plowing, harrowing, planting, and cultivating potatoes and corn; mowing and raking hay); milking 12 cows, and caring for them and their calves; harvesting vegetables; cutting corn for ensilage; delivering milk; digging, grading, boxing, and delivering potatoes. Her employer says, "Margaret is a hard worker and does a wonderful job."

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THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

WHAT IT IS

The Women's Land Army is vital to the Farm Labor Program of the War Food Administration, authorized by Congress April 29, 1943. The purpose of the program is to supplement the efforts of farmers to provide themselves with "an adequate supply of workers for the production, harvesting, * * * of agricultural commodities essential to the prosecution of the war * * *"

Any woman, 18 years of age or over, physically fit to do farm work, who assists in the wartime production of food, feed, or fiber on a farm is eligible for the Women's Land Army. Both nonfarm and farm women performing agricultural tasks are included, as well as those women who by performing household duties release farm women for agricultural work.

The Women's Land Army in each State is under the direction of a supervisor with headquarters at the State agricultural college. She recruits workers and helps to place them on the farms where they are most needed and where they will fit in best.

WHY IT IS NEEDED

In 1944 the American farmer is expected to produce more food than he has ever produced before. He broke all previous records in 1943, with an output 32 percent above the 1935–39 average, 5 percent above the previous all-time record of 1942, and 50 percent above any year's production during the first World War. This production victory was achieved despite the fact that between 1940 and 1943, about 1 million young farm men had joined the armed forces and another 3 million potential farm workers had gone into war plants and other industries. Women, youth, and older men must replace them!

HOW MANY ARE NEEDED?

The farm manpower problem in 1944 is to obtain 4 million workers in addition to the regular farm-labor force of approximately 8 million. The goal for women is about 800,000. This is 200,000 more women than worked last year, and the Women's Land Army expects to recruit and place about half of this number.

WHO THEY ARE

Who are the women who helped the farmer to reach his production goals in 1943, and who in greater numbers will help him in 1944?

First of all, they are farm wives and daughters. Studies in 1942 showed twice as many farm women doing farm work as in 1941, and this trend continues. In some areas, from 50 to 75 percent of the farm women are doing agricultural tasks, many for the first time. Farm women are eligible for the Women's Land Army, and many enrolled in 1943.

Some of the women workers placed by the Extension Service do seasonal farm work regularly, but many—and nationally the number is difficult to estimate—are brand new to farm work of any kind. California's findings are revealing. In that State, approximately 35,000 women worked on farms in 1943. Ten thousand of these were farm women (6,000 of whom had not formerly done farm work); 10,000 were part of the prewar, normal local and migrant seasonal labor supply; and 15,000 were nonfarm volunteer women who helped out primarily because of the war emergency.

The nonfarm women working in agriculture include college girls and teachers, many of whom work from 3 to 5 months; business and professional women such as nurses, librarians, technicians, salesgirls, clerks, and stenographers, who spend vacation periods of 1 or 2 weeks in harvest work; industrial workers who use their "off time" in emergencies; homemakers, including wives of servicemen, who work parts of days at the time of greatest need.

AND THEIR FARM JOBS

WHAT THEY DO

Variety of tasks characterizes the farm activities of women. Possibly the greatest contribution these women make is in the harvesting of vegetables and fruits, where their dexterity, carefulness, and persistence are great assets. But to name any farm job that will not be done by some woman somewhere in 1944 would be difficult.

A leader in one of the Southern States describes women's farm work as follows: "Women are managing the farming operations; marketing the produce; driving tractors, combines, and trucks; plowing: raking hay; shaking and stacking peanuts; picking cotton; harvesting and curing tobacco; and riding the range."

Peak-load jobs in which women help to save the day in the Midwest include picking up potatoes, bean hoeing, corn detasseling, corn husking, small-grain harvesting, and fruit and truck gardening. Placements of women are made in the far West for general farm work, irrigating, driving tractors, pruning fruit trees, working with dairy herds and poultry, and haying. Women help in almost every kind of harvest—prune, peach, apricot, grape, rice, walnut, berry, pear, tomato, and cherry.

In year-round jobs, women excel in dairy work, where gentleness and high standards of cleanliness are important. There are women cow testers; and many women are on poultry farms.

WHERE THEY LIVE

The great majority of seasonal women workers live at home and go out to help as the daily needs are announced. Some are housed in camps or other group-living units. Camps furnish a farm-labor supply center for farmers of the immediate neighborhood, allowing the worker to give a short or long period of time to farm work and the farmer to order a daily quota of workers. Experience in California, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Virginia shows that women like the opportunity to make new friends and combine simple recreation with hard work. Where camps are practical, they meet one of the problems in employing women for farm work—adequate living arrangements. The "unit," or group-living, plan will probably be used more extensively for women farm workers in 1944.

Some general statements, based on 1943 experiences, may be made concerning the kind of woman who makes good as a farm worker and as to the kind of employer who employs women workers to the best advantage.

Most women who volunteer for service on a farm are motivated by a sincere patriotic desire to help produce food for the armed services and for our allies in the war. This kind of motive is helpful in tiding the green worker over the first hardships.

Good physical condition is important, since farm work is primarily physical labor involving bending, stooping, reaching, pulling, hauling, and lifting. Women who like outdoor life and growing things and know from experience in sports or work that they have good muscular coordination, are adaptable to farm work. All women who plan to live with farm families or in labor-supply camps, or wish to work the year round, should have a physical examination to show their fitness for farm work. Those who plan to work for short periods should satisfy themselves that they are in condition to do the work planned. Preliminary "toughening-up" exercises are helpful.

Adaptability is a second important attribute of the good woman farm worker. The sun is hot, soil is dirty, plants prickle and stain; each unaccustomed chore requires the exercise of muscles seldom used. Country living conditions often do not include some of the conveniences found in towns and cities.

Dependability is a quality greatly prized by farmers in their workers. This is not peculiar to farm work, but is a particular blessing to the farmer-supervisor who has a dozen tasks besides watching his workers.

Patience is probably the prime

requisite for the farmer who is hiring inexperienced women. He will need to instruct his workers carefully and thoroughly at the start and encourage them to ask questions. Women learn quickly if there is full explanation and demonstration of the job to be done.

The farmer who recognizes that he and the women who work on his farm are striving together toward the common goal of record food production and who shows them that he recognizes this, will be rewarded by the loyalty of his workers. Assignment of workers to jobs for which they are best suited will result in better work. An occasional word of merited praise will do wonders. Consideration for the health, safety, and comfort of women workers also pays dividends in good performance.

Many farmers expressed satisfaction with women's work in 1943, and the women, themselves, expressed pleasure in doing their farm job well. One farmer said, "Women are conscientious, do a thorough piece of work, and are dependable." A woman farm worker said, " * * * one of the best summers in health gained, new friends made, and, perhaps most important of all, the consciousness of doing some useful work."

TRAINING

Most women farm workers are trained on the job. However, many States arrange brief, specific training courses for such special tasks as driving and servicing tractors, pruning fruit trees, and picking and packing apples. In certain States where the need for year-round dairy and poultry workers is acute, short courses in these two fields were given in 1943 and will be available again in 1944. Women receive subsistence during training. Instruction is largely practical, and the trainee learns by doing.

WAGES

Women farm workers are paid the prevailing wage in the area in which they work, for the amount and type of work they do. The wage is a matter of agreement between the worker and the farmer. Year-round wages range from $25 to $50 a month, with room and board furnished. In a few places a higher wage is paid.

Most seasonal workers are paid by the hour or by the measure. Hourly rates range from 25 to 50 cents; in some places, more. Rates per measure vary with the crop and the area. An inexperienced worker who is paid piece-work rates often finds it difficult to earn the cost of her board and room unless she works long enough to gain proficiency. In a few camps in 1943 a guaranteed wage of $30 to $40 a month, with room and board, was paid.

Except in a few areas or for a few crops, farm wages do not provide the strongest incentive for doing farm work in wartime. Women are motivated by a desire to perform patriotic service. They also take into account the educational values to be gained, as well as the advantages of improved health, camp life and companionship, new friends, out-of-door life, and contact with farm people.

CLOTHES

The Women's Land Army work outfit is designed especially for women farm workers. It consists of dark-blue overalls; a choice of long-sleeved or short-sleeved, light-blue shirt; a short, dark-blue jacket; and a hat of the two shades of blue, with a visor to shade the face from the sun. The WLA insignia in red, white, and blue are on the overalls and hat. The work outfit may be purchased at a nominal cost by any woman helping to produce food, feed, or fiber on a farm. Order blanks are furnished by the county agent.

Other suitable clothing includes overalls or slacks, cotton shirts, wide-brimmed straw hats, and low-heeled shoes with thick soles. Open-toed shoes are not practical. Clothing should be comfortable and easily washable.

ACCIDENT INSURANCE

A personal-accident policy is available to women farm workers. It covers medical expenses up to $250 and includes a death benefit, as well as benefits for loss of feet, hands, or sight. The policy costs $4 for 3 months, or $1.50 for 1 month. Application blanks may be obtained from the county agent.

RECORD FOR 1943

250,000 women workers were placed on farms by the local placement offices of the Extension Service Farm Labor Program between April 29 and December 31, 1943.
5,500 were reported as placed in year-round work.
29,000 farm women doing agricultural work enrolled in the Women's Land Army.
11 States had assistant supervisors spending full time on the Women's Land Army program. Some of them were assisted by State or district representatives.
31 States had assistant supervisors spending part time on the Women's Land Army pro
8 States gave special agricultural short courses to train women for year-round farm w
13,500 women were given some training for farm work in 35 States.

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